



New York State Archives

**New York State Dept. of Environmental Conservation
Division of Water Drainage Basin Subject Files A1120**

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Overview of the Records

Repository:	New York State Archives
Summary:	The series consists of subject files documenting cooperative state and federal government efforts to monitor and control pollution and water resources development in New York State drainage basins. Each river basin's file contains information pertinent to locations (of towns or rivers) within that basin. Records include correspondence, memoranda, reports, classification files, water resources and development studies, pollution abatement and hearing files, and other subject files. Also included are related plans, maps, profiles, sections, and photographs.
Creator:	New York (State). Division of Water
Title:	Drainage basin subject files
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Quantity:	including 1200 maps
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Bulk Date:	1950-1975
Series:	A1120
Sponsor:	Funding for encoding this finding aid was provided through a grant awarded by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

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Arrangement

Alphabetical by name of river basin, then by town or river within that basin, and therein by subject.

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Administrative History

A drainage basin is a tract of land drained by a river and its tributaries, sometimes referred to as a watershed. The files were first produced by the departments of Health and Conservation which had responsibility for establishing and monitoring pollution levels in state waters and regulating water waste management. After 1970 the Department of Environmental Conservation assumed these responsibilities as well as primary responsibility for state policy on those issues.

Some of the earliest records (ca. 1907-1909) are forms completed by sanitary inspectors providing the Health Department with information on stream pollution from factory sewage wastes. By the 1970s, the Department of Environmental Conservation had a full water quality and effluent monitoring network. Bad water quality or the poor working condition of a water supply system or treatment facility can result in contamination. Data on waste composition is necessary to determine the impact of chemical waste disposal on marine resources. In addition, the records cover work projects of several federal agencies, usually done in cooperation with the Department of Health and in response to federal action in the citing of industrial polluters or combating pollution of interstate waterways.

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Scope and Content Note

The series consists of subject files documenting several decades of cooperative state and federal government efforts to monitor and control pollution and water resources development in New York State drainage basins. Records include correspondence, memoranda, reports, classification files, water resources and development studies, pollution abatement and hearing files, and other subject files. There are also some related plans, maps, profiles, sections, photographs, and a few dictation belts and discs used in transcription.

The files include the following: water resources and development studies, including information on inventories and status of basin polluters, existing sewage treatment plant efficiencies, present and projected water quality inventories, determination and projection of water treatment requirements, and low flow augmentation storage needs and estimated costs of waste treatment.

Reports in the series include reports on the state's water pollution control program, pollution reports for the various river basins as well as pollution abatement plans and program files, published reports from the Water Pollution Control Board under the "Drainage Basin Series" giving the recommended classifications and assignment of standards for quality and purity of the designated state waters.

Also included are annual reports on the status of public water supplies for the major drainage basins, giving names of water company, district or authority, type and grade of treatment plant, if the plant operator meets sanitary code requirements for training, and data on inspections, samples, water supply plans, and the status of existing or planned plant improvements.

Special reports are also present. The Department of the Interior provided a report on the flow of sewage entering the treatment plant at Albany as a result of an agreement with the Department of Health for a statewide program to investigate the water resources of the state. Another example is material resulting from congressional hearings on a bill to establish sanctuaries to preserve marine life and to develop standards for dumping waste material into the sea off the shore of New York City.

Other records found in this series are pollution survey files, including inspections done after reports of fish kills and lists of discharges requiring corrective action; classification files covering the process of establishing classifications and standards for the surface waters of the state based on hydrologic studies and public meetings; and reclassification hearing files, including notices of public hearings, statements made at the hearings, and accompanying correspondence; and industrial water supply files, including a few general blueprint plans for pollution abatement projects, often done as preliminary estimates of industrial water supply; and occasional copies of newspaper clippings, letters of support or concern, and related memoranda on public reaction and/or activism in pollution monitoring or control (e.g., annual meeting minutes of the Hudson River Conservation Society).

Also present in the series are results of chemical and bacteriological tests of water samples, often in the form of charts or diagrams; timetables and summaries of conferences to clean up pollution (e.g., International Field Year for the Great Lakes), often including progress reports from participating states in federally sponsored projects (e.g., Federal Enforcement Conference on the Niagara River/Lake Erie Basin, or the Hudson River Enforcement Conference).

Correspondence includes administrative memoranda on developing basin water quality management plans, sometimes containing an assessment of existing water quality (derived from monitoring station data, direct observation, and survey information), and also the evaluation of locations of existing monitoring stations and recommendations for additional stations; and general correspondence, including response to complaints on pollution, transmittal letters and mailing lists for copies of reports or publications, and requests for representation at state, local, or interstate meetings on pollution control or abatement.

The records also include many examples of federal and state government cooperation. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, for example, had jurisdiction over navigable waters. This was interpreted by the federal courts to include feeder streams and tributaries, lakes, and ponds, and so the files for pollution abatement of shore installations (e.g., Lake Champlain, Hudson River, New York Harbor) contain pertinent evaluations and memoranda. There is also detailed data reported by the U.S. Geological Survey, especially for the 1950s, on daily gage height and discharge from gauging stations, often with inspections done by the Corps of Engineers. The Atomic Energy Commission did a 1959 New York Harbor Study to investigate dispersal of reactor fuels and wastes from a "hypothetical accident involving a nuclear powered merchant ship."

The records also include copies of diagrams and information charts, many of which are included in reports. Examples of information found in the diagrams include: rate and cost of water consumption; water table configurations; average coliform concentrations; amounts of dissolved oxygen, the biological oxygen demand (BOD) and the chemical oxygen demand (COD) contained in wastes; wind and tidal cycle charts; average rainfall; and acres of area flooded and cross sections of proposed dam sites.

Maps, charts, and soundings are found throughout the series. They are usually photocopies or whiteprint copies. They are extremely varied in size and the type of information they provide. Most often they show: drainage basins and watershed (sometimes photocopies of topographic quadrangle maps); locations of sampling stations used in pollution surveys; surveys of coliform densities and locations of chemical stations, ranges, and sampling points; proposed channel improvements and stabilization projects, sometimes with additional index or location maps as insets; areas subject to flooding, areas requiring drainage, floodway dikes, and debris basins; and the impact or location of special projects (e.g., proposed special anchorage areas for a yacht club, or a chart of shellfisheries near Long Island with the approximate limits of acid dumping areas).

The following undated items are found at the beginning of the series: An "Index to Drainage Basins" listing the name of the basin according to what is apparently the original drawer number from which the files were removed; "Basin Survey Listings -- Water Pollution Control Program" listing major basin reports (1 to 60) and including major basin number, report number, designated drainage basin of survey, drainage basin survey series, and report number; a list of drainage basins giving "date of adoption" and "date became effective" (all in the 1950s and 1960s). "List of Reclassification Hearings -- Surface Water" giving names of basins and sub-basins, creek/river, date, and location. A 1970 Department of Environmental Conservation bulletin, "Characteristics of New York Lakes," consisting of a three part gazetteer of lakes, ponds, and reservoirs (including major and minor drainage basins) arranged alphabetically, by drainage basin, and by county. "Allegany River Drainage Basin Series Report No. 1."

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Use of Records

Access Restrictions

There are no restrictions regarding access to or use of the material.

Alternate Formats Available

Items Online

High resolution images of selected original documents in this series are available in State Archives Digital Collections.

[Drainage basin subject files, 1904-1977 in Digital Collections](#)

Access Terms

- Diagrams
- Watershed management--New York (State)
- Sectional perspectives
- Pollution
- Drainage
- Environmental protection
- Rivers--New York (State)
- Water-supply--New York (State)
- Transcripts
- New York (State)
- Maps (documents)
- Test reports
- Charts (graphic documents)
- Water--Pollution
- Hydrology--New York (State)
- Reports
- Protecting environment
- Water resources development--Environmental aspects
- Hydrography--Tables
- Water quality management
- Photographic prints
- Environmental health
- Profiles
- Water quality management
- Location maps
- Watersheds--New York (State)
- Pollution control
- Memorandums
- New York (State). Department of Environmental Conservation
- New York (State). Conservation Department
- New York (State). Department of Health